

Sanctions in school from a pedagogical point of view

Effectiveness of sanctions:

Scientific studies show that under appropriate conditions, punishment can permanently suppress or at least reduce a certain form of behaviour. In cases where punishment does not change behaviour: the sanctions had positive side effects (e.g. fulfilled the pupil's need for attention).

Is the use of sanctions ethically justifiable?

This depends on the behaviour that is to be eliminated. sanctions are justified in cases of dangerous and extremely undesirable behaviour.

Examples:

- Misuse of chemicals in chemistry classes.
- Destruction of /damage to school property
- Harm to other students,...
- Tyrannizing fellow pupils
- highly frequent disruptions of lessons

Side effects of detentions

- The pupil associates the sanction with the person who punishes. Consequences: e.g. the pupil avoids the teacher
- Stimulus generalisation; i.e. transferring the feelings of rejection to the subject represented by the teacher or to school in general. Consequences: e.g. truancy
- Unintentional higher level avoidance behaviour such as copying homework from others, inventing excuses, ...
- Desirable behaviour is achieved through fear of sanctions. The development of intellectual independence and of interest in the subject are thus more likely to be suppressed. If the threat of sanctions is removed, the desired form of behaviour might disappear.
- Teacher behaviour may be adopted by the pupil as a model behaviour.
- Possible positive reinforcement by fellow pupils (due to solidarity)

Correct use of punishment:

- Investigations show that punishment is most effective when
- it immediately follows unwanted behaviour (i.e. the pupil must realize the connection between behaviour and punishment)
- it does not allow for any possibility of evasion
- it is adequate
- the punished person realizes what he/she has done wrong and is able to behave differently.
- a warning is consistently followed by punishment. That way warnings become effective tools.

- A type 2 punishment (deprivation of amenities) has fewer negative side effects than a type 1 punishment.

Pedagogical aspects

- Whenever possible: Issue a warning of punishment!
- If possible: reinforce desired behaviour.
- Punishment should not be discouraging, but show the way to improvement.
- Punishment must aim at making amends, restoring order, preventing misbehaviour.
- It must not (further) destroy the relationship between teacher and student.
- The punisher should check whether his/her own behaviour might have caused unwanted pupil behaviour.

Conclusion:

The use of punishment must be carefully considered and conscientiously justified in each individual case. Often the harm is greater than the benefit.